Passengers spend night in train after power glitch in Channel tunnel

PARIS: Rail traffic through the Channel tunnel slowly resumed with more cancellations and delays on Wednesday after an electricity failure stranded thousands of passengers and trapped some for a night in a powerless train.

Two London-Paris trains were cancelled and most trips were delayed in both directions as Eurostar warned

of "knock-on impacts" on New Year's Eve.

Christelle Renouf, her husband and two children arrived in Paris after boarding a train from London for a journey that took 12 hours longer than expected.

"After boarding, the train first stopped for an hour because there wasn't enough staff, then it stopped again just before the tunnel, because an overhead line fell" on one of the carriages, she said in the French capital's Gare du Nord railway station.

They spent the night in a train "without electricity, water or wifi", she added.

A spokeswoman said "an overhead line fell onto a Eurostar train linking London and Paris, near the entrance to the Channel Tunnel".

New Year travellers had to scramble to find alternatives after the operator postponed all services between London, Paris, Amsterdam and Brussels on Tuesday.

But on Wednesday, Eurostar said services had "resumed today following a power issue in the Channel Tunnel and some further issues with rail infrastructure overnight".

It added that there could be "some delays and possible last-minute cancellations".

One man told the BBC he boarded the 19.01 (GMT) train to Paris on Tuesday, but at 0300 on Wednesday he was still sitting in the train at the entrance to the tunnel.

France's BFMTV reported passengers were left waiting in the night on a train from London to Lille without electricity and heating.—AFP

CARS wait in Calais, on the French side of the Channel Tunnel, as a major outage hit the link between Britain and France.—Reuters

Taiwanese firm starts mass production of tiny 2nm chips

TAIPEI: Taiwanese tech titan TSMC has started mass production of its cutting-edge two-nanometer (nm) semiconductor chips, the company said in a statement on Wednesday.

A nanometer is so small that even one millimeter equals one million, while there are one billion nanometers in one metre.

TSMC is the world's largest contract maker of chips, used in everything from smartphones to missiles, and counts Nvidia and Apple among its clients.

"TSMC's 2nm (N2) technology has started volume production as planned," TSMC said in a statement on its website.

The chips will be the "most advanced technology in the semiconductor industry in terms of both density and energy efficiency", the company said.

"N2 technology, with leading nanosheet transistor structure, will deliver full-node performance and power benefits to address the increasing need for energy-efficient computing."

The chips will be produced at TSMC's facility in Hsinchu, northern Taiwan, and in the southern port city of Kaohsiung.

More than half of the world's semiconductors, and nearly all of the most advanced ones used to power artificial intelligence technology, are made in Taiwan.

TSMC has been a massive beneficiary of the frenzy in AI investment. Nvidia and Apple are among firms pouring many billions of dollars into chips, servers and data centres.

AI-related spending is soaring worldwide, and is expected to reach approximately $1.5 trillion in early 2026, according to US research firm Gartner, and over $2tr by the end of the year - nearly two per cent of global GDP.

The Taiwanese firm has invested in chip fabrication facilities in the United States, Japan and Germany to meet soaring demand for semiconductors, which have become the lifeblood of the global economy.—AFP

Finland seizes vessel after cable damage

HELSINKI: Finnish police said on Wednesday they had seized a vessel suspected of damaging a telecommunications cable that runs between Helsinki and Tallinn in the Gulf of Finland several hours earlier.

Police did not disclose any details about the identity of the vessel, but Finnish public broadcaster *Yle*, citing the MarineTraffic specialised website, said the ship was the *Fitburg*, a 132-meter-long cargo ship bearing a flag from St Vincent and the Grenadines, en route from St Petersburg, Russia, to Haifa, Israel.

The seized ship is suspected of being "responsible for the damage to the cable", which is owned by Finnish telecoms group Elisa and located in Estonia's exclusive economic zone, Finnish police said in a statement.

Part of the Baltic Sea, the Gulf of Finland is bordered by Estonia, Finland, and Russia.

Elisa said in a statement that the cable damage had "not affected the functionality of Elisa's services in any way", noting that its services had been rerouted.—AFP

Iranian protesters warned of 'decisive response'

TEHRAN: A government building in southern Iran was attacked on Wednesday, as the country's top prosecutor warned of a "decisive response" to any attempt to create instability after days of economic protests.

Spontaneous protests, driven by dissatisfaction with Iran's economic stagnation, began on Sunday in Tehran's largest mobile phone market, where shopkeepers shuttered their businesses, and have since drawn in students across the country.

"A portion of the provincial governor's office door and its glass were destroyed in an attack by a number of people," said Hamed Ostovar, the head of the judiciary in the city of Fasa.

The attack came after the country's prosecutor general said the protesters' economic concerns were legitimate, but warned action would be taken if necessary.

"Peaceful livelihood protests are part of social and understandable realities," Mohammad Movahedi-Azad told state media.

"Any attempt to turn economic protests into a tool of insecurity, destruction of public property, or implementation of externally-designed scenarios will inevitably be met with a legal, proportionate and decisive response."

His comments came days after Israel's Mossad intelligence agency posted on social media that it was "with you on the ground" in a message to Iranian protesters.

Posting on its Persian-language *X* account, the spy agency encouraged Iranians to "go out into the streets together".

Iran, which does not recognise Israel, has long accused it of conducting sabotage operations against its nuclear facilities and assassinating its scientists.

Fighting for food

The rallies have since built momentum, with students at 10 universities in the capital and in other cities, including Iran's most prestigious institutions, joining in on Tuesday.

The vice president of the University of Tehran, Mohammad Reza Taghidokt, told the Iranian Students News Agency that four students were arrested on Tuesday and released overnight.

Nevertheless, the protests remain limited in number and concentrated in central Tehran, with shops elsewhere in the sprawling metropolis of 10 million people unaffected.

Iran's economy has been in the doldrums for years, with heavy US and international sanctions over its nuclear programme weighing heavily on it.

The currency, the rial, has also plunged in recent months, losing more than a third of its value against the dollar since last year.

Some basic necessities are becoming unaffordable for a portion of the population, which has been suffering from international sanctions for decades.

"Everyone here is fighting for a scrap of bread," said one protester interviewed by a newspaper.

Schools, banks and public institutions were closed on Wednesday for a bank holiday, with officials saying the directive was due to the cold weather and the need to save energy.—AFP

France plans social media ban for children under 15

PARIS: France will make a fresh attempt to protect children from excessive screen time, proposing a ban on social media access for children under 15 by next September, according to a draft law.

The initiative is backed by President Emmanuel Macron, who said earlier this month that parliament should start debating such a proposal in January.

Australia this month imposed a social media ban on under-16s, in a world first.

"Many studies and reports now confirm the various risks caused by excessive use of digital screens by adolescents," the French draft says.

Children with unfettered online access were exposed to "inappropriate content" and could suffer from cyber-harassment or experience changes to their sleep patterns, the government said.—AFP

Temperature records broken across the world in 2025

PARIS: Central Asia, the Sahel region and northern Europe experienced their hottest year on record in 2025, according to analysis based on data from the European Copernicus programme.

Globally, the last 12 months are expected to be the third hottest ever recorded after 2024 and 2023, according to the provisional data, which will be confirmed by Copernicus in its annual report in early January.

But the average, which includes land and oceans, masks overall records for certain parts of the world.

Since many poorer nations do not publish detailed climate data, experts completed the global picture by independently analysing Copernicus data from climate models, measurements from about 20 satellites, and weather stations.

The data spans the whole world, hour by hour, since 1970.

Here is what the detailed analysis revealed for 2025, during which 120 monthly temperature records were broken in more than 70 countries.

Records shattered in Central Asia

Every country in Central Asia broke its annual temperature records.

Landlocked, mountainous Tajikistan, where only 41 per cent of the population has access to safe drinking water, saw the highest abnormal temperatures in the world, at more than 3C above its seasonal averages from 1981 to 2010.

Monthly temperature records have been broken every month since May, with the exception of November.

Neighbouring countries such as Kazakhstan, Iran and Uzbekistan experienced temperatures 2C to 3C above the seasonal average.

Up to 1.5C hotter in Sahel

Temperature records were beaten in several countries in the Sahel and west Africa.

Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Chad saw a rare divergence in temperatures, notching 0.7C to 1.5C above their seasonal average.

The last 12 months were the hottest ever recorded in Nigeria, and one of the fourth hottest in the other countries.

Scientists from the World Weather Attribution (WWA) network, who assess the role of human-induced climate change in extreme weather events, wrote in their annual report published on Monday that extreme heat events "have become almost 10 times more likely since 2015".

Countries in the Sahel, the semi-arid region of west and north-central Africa stretching from Senegal to Sudan, are among the most vulnerable to rising temperatures, with many already facing armed conflict, food insecurity and widespread poverty.

Scorching summer in Europe

Ten European countries are on the verge of, or coming close to, breaking their annual temperature record, notably due to an exceptional summer.

In Switzerland and several Balkan countries, summer temperatures were 2C and even 3C above their seasonal average.

Spain, Portugal and Britain also recorded their worst summer on record, with extreme heat fuelling massive wildfires.

The driest spring in more than a century led to a UK water shortage.

Northern Europe was largely spared the heatwave that hit Europe at the end of June, but it instead experienced an abnormally warm autumn.

The last 12 months are expected to be one of the two warmest years on record in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland.—AFP

NEWSMAKERS

OLLANTAYTAMBO (Peru): Police carry an injured passenger from one of two trains after a head-on collision connecting the archaeological site of Machu Picchu with Pampacahua, a nearby town. The collision left one person dead and 40 others injured.—AFP

HONG KONG: People watch live performances and a light show during New Year celebrations.—AFP

NEW DELHI: People sit beside a bonfire under a tree amid dense smog on a cold winter morning.—AFP

A CAMBODIAN soldier (right), who had been captured by Thai soldiers in July, hugs his daughter as he arrives with other freed soldiers at the former international airport in Phnom Penh.—AFP

Cambodian soldiers freed by Thailand receive hero's welcome

PHNOM PENH: Eighteen Cambodian soldiers received a hero's welcome home on Wednesday, after Thailand released them as part of a truce deal that ended weeks of deadly fighting along their contested frontier.

A decades-old border dispute between the Southeast Asian neighbours erupted into military clashes several times this year, with the latest round of fighting in December killing dozens of people and displacing more than a million.

Some of the 18 soldiers — who were captured by Thailand and held for five months as prisoners of war — smiled, waved, and gestured with their palms pressed together to cheering crowds through bus windows in the border province of Pailin, and later in Phnom Penh.

Hundreds of well-wishers lined the streets of the capital, hollering and waving national flags, as a caravan of minibuses shuttled the returned men and teary-eyed relatives through the city.

One woman in the crowd, Im Sivorn, 53, said their homecoming was like a gift for the new year.

"As a Cambodian, I am very happy to welcome these 18 heroic soldiers back to the country," she said.

The 18 men, each wearing a Cambodian football jersey, met Prime Minister Hun Manet and his wife, Pich Chanmony, later on Wednesday. —AFP

CABOURG (France): Revellers wearing 1900 style costumes stand in the sea as they take part in the traditional last swim of the year.—AFP

ANKARA: People pose for a photo on New Year's Eve in the Turkish capital.—Reuters